

Convocation Speech
March 20, 1942
Foster Rhea Dulles

Mr. President, Members of the graduating class, ladies and gentlemen:

For you men and women who are graduating today from Ohio State University, present world conditions offer a magnificent challenge. I am not going to condole with you upon the harsh circumstances which mark this graduation. This country is at war. The entire world is at war. Going deeper beneath the surface of present day events, we are confronted with a social revolution which involves all the peoples of the earth. Your lives will inevitably be swept into the whirling vortex of these great events. For a time - and no one can say for how long - your individual interests, your individual hopes and aspirations, will be submerged by the felt necessities of the hour. But you stand on the threshold of a new world, and the opportunity of making it a better world than anything past generations have ever known is the stirring challenge which confronts you.

Something less than a quarter of a century ago, another such opportunity was at hand. We had fought - and successfully fought - a war which in our high idealism we believed would make the world safe for democracy, a war that would end all wars. But we thought that victory alone marked the attainment of our goal. It was to usher in Utopia. In 1919 we believed that the job was done, and nothing more was demanded of us. I do not mean merely that the United States refused to join the League of Nations. Our really tragic mistake, I think, was in failing to realize that we had to make democracy safe for the world, as well as make the world safe for democracy. -- And there was a great deal to be done.

Such economic developments of the twentieth century as the rise of industrialism, mass methods of production in our factories, technological unemployment, over-expansion in agriculture - all these

complex factors were working a change in the status of great masses of people. Their economic freedom was being seriously threatened, and in many cases greatly curtailed. The Western World had largely achieved political democracy - but what of social democracy? In our industrialized society, its bases were far from secure. And yet the one had little meaning without the other. A man deprived of the right to work, could not be satisfied with the privilege of voting. A man who was hungry, or whose children were hungry, could not sustain himself on the Bill of Rights. We did not recognize then - as I think we do now - as President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill have made clear in the Atlantic charter - that democracy must be based not only upon freedom of speech and freedom of religion, but also upon freedom from want and freedom from fear.

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We are now again engaged in war. Let me read a brief quotation:

"Our object is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power, and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth ensure the observance of those principles....Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable when the peace of the world is involved, and the freedom of peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people."

But these are not the words of President Roosevelt, nor of any one of today's leaders. They are the words of Woodrow Wilson in 1917. But although the primary objective of today's war so closely parallels that of the war twenty-five years ago, victory must be construed in quite different terms. It will mark a beginning not an end - another opportunity, another chance, to make democracy truly

effective. Our real goal is to establish a world in which individual freedom and economic security - for nations and for men - may somehow be reconciled. Winning the war will not solve this basic problem of our age, but it will clear the tracks for progressive action. Hitlerism - with its stifling of individual freedom and degradation of human dignity - is an obstacle which must be overcome before we renew the march toward social democracy. Hitlerism is not the wave of the future; it is a dangerous undertow. It is counter-revolution against the basic forces within the democratic nations that are working slowly toward a new world order of their own - a world order that will give reality to democratic principles that have never been really applied.

It has taken us long to realize what we must do - to establish a unified purpose among the enemies of aggression, to win national unity here in the United States. But it is to our everlasting credit, I believe, that we have been so slow to go to war. The unreadiness of the democratic nations, as contrasted with the organized might of Germany, Italy and Japan, marks a vital distinction between our opposed philosophies. Moreover indecision and delay, blunders and mistakes, are the price invariably paid for a political system that draws its support from the freely expressed will of all the people.

There is much criticism today of failure in this country to meet the full responsibilities of war - criticism of the executive by members of Congress, criticism of Congress by the people, criticism of industry by labor, criticism of labor by industry - each group finding the other at fault. There is value in criticism - but let it be constructive, and let us be sure we are doing our own part before we attack others. And despite this criticism, justified as much of it may be, the United States is today making far greater progress

toward effective action on the front line than at a comparable period in the first World War. In January, 1918 - after we had been at war ten long and discouraging months - a Senate committee bluntly reported that "the military establishment of America has broken down. It has almost ceased functioning". But the Fall of that same year, two million men were on the fighting front in France three thousand miles away.

Delay, blunders, loss of opportunity are a consequence of the fact that the people of a democracy must determine their own course. They are slow in finding themselves. That is at present our weakness; but it is also the source of our ultimate strength.

Some of you may recall that moving passage in John Steinbeck's brilliant new book "The Moon is Down". The Norwegian mayor, about to be arrested, has told the commander of the German forces of occupation that the day will come when the Germans will be driven out and destroyed. "The people don't like to be conquered, sir, and so they will not be. Free men cannot start a war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat. Herd men, followers of a leader, cannot do that, and so it is always the herd men who win the battles and the free men who win wars."

We know that to be true. We know that ultimately we will win this war - in Europe and in the Far East. But this time we must win the peace too - and that also demands confidence, just as much as war itself - confidence in ourselves, and in our principles.

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Before the war the Governments of Germany and Japan attributed our aversion from war to weakness, to softness, to decadence. But for all our blunders democracy is proving that it is neither weak, nor soft, nor decadent. It is the people - everywhere - who are today

demanding more energetic efforts on the part of the government, demanding that the United Nations take the offensive. It is the people - everywhere - who by their voluntary acceptance of wartime restrictions are proving that democracy can rise to a crisis. Already Hitler and the Japanese are learning how completely they miscalculated the American reaction to war. We are gradually asserting that dynamic strength latent in democracy that during the 1930's appeared to have passed over to the fascist nations.

Along what lines will that revived power be directed when the immediate task of defeating Germany and Japan is accomplished? Victorious in war, can democracy also be victorious in peace? The decision is ours. Insofar as this country is concerned, the future is what the American people choose to make it. We must think of it now; we must plan for it now. When peace breaks out, as it will, we cannot afford to be caught as unready as we were when war broke out. And this involves, first, our international role in the postwar world; second, our policies here at home.

The United States cannot avoid its international responsibilities - they are inherent in our economic and political strength. "In foreign affairs", Theodore Roosevelt stated almost forty years ago, "we must make up our minds that, whether we wish it or not, we are a great people and must play a great part in the world. It is not open to us to choose whether we will play that part or not. We have to play it. All we can decide is whether we shall play it well or ill."

Once the enemy is defeated, militarism overthrown and the aggressor nations completely disarmed, the world will look to American leadership. How shall we exercise it?

We must in the first place realize that it is a revolution as well as a war in which the world is engaged. For our own sake we must do what we can to prevent this revolution from becoming one of post-war blood and violence. The extent to which we are prepared to afford the rest of the world generous and unstinted assistance may spell the difference between anarchy and order. We must aid in the reconstruction of Europe along lines which the free nations of Europe will themselves determine; we must seek understanding - and perhaps nothing will be more important - with Soviet Russia; we must recognize the right of the peoples of Asia to the freedom for which they are struggling. It is not our function to attempt to impose democracy upon any of these nations. Their government is their own concern. So long as they refrain from aggression, we should be prepared to cooperate with them.

One certain result of victory in this war, I believe, will be the creation of a truly independent China. For almost five years that country has been heroically resisting Japanese aggression. With almost a third of her territory occupied by the enemy, with her means of access to the outside world one by one cut off, China still fights on. "My armies may bend", General Chiang Kai-shek has declared, "but they will never break". When we feel discouraged, the fortitude, the courage, the patience of the Chinese people should inspire us to new efforts. China will be free at the close of the war. It must be a China free not only of the threat of Japanese domination but of attempted encroachments upon its independence on the part of any other nation. There must be an end to nineteenth century imperialism in the Far East. The new world role of the peoples of Asia - to which China is today dramatically summoning them - should be both recognized and welcomed by the peoples of the West.

We must be prepared also, I believe, to recognize the rights of the common people of the defeated nations, and their legitimate economic needs. I am one of those who believe that it is as true today as it was some two centuries ago that you cannot indict a whole people. There are those who maintain that hatred - hatred of the enemy peoples - is a necessary weapon of war. I do not know that it will make us fight more effectively; I feel certain that it would block the road to lasting peace. This time we must have a world settlement which will both set up effective controls against further aggression, and avoid the injustices which are the seedbed of aggression. We must be firm, tough-minded, where firmness is in order; we must be conciliatory where concessions are essential. The importance of psychological disarmament as well as physical disarmament must be remembered. The latter can be accomplished by force; the former only by fair dealing. The future peace cannot be confined in a straitjacket. It must provide the means for its own revision as conditions change in a swiftly changing world. The international gangsters - Hitler, Mussolini, the Japanese military - must be compelled to pay the full penalty for their crimes against society, but we must try to remedy the conditions that are responsible for gangsterism.

Such a peace is possible. To despair of our ability to make it, is defeatism as dangerous as defeatism in war. We must think in terms of opportunity rather than problems. Perhaps this war is a scourge of God, sent to arouse Europe to the necessity of cooperation, to establish the freedom of the peoples of Asia, to revitalize democracy in America. When it is finally over, the slate will be clean for a generation that has learned the lessons of the past to write another and more hopeful chapter in world history.

Here at home - in the United States - international security should also clear the way to deal more realistically and effectively with domestic affairs. The underlying trends in our national development today are full of promise. Our tremendous war effort shows what we can really do. The mobilization of our resources for war points the way toward their continued mobilization for peace in the interests of the people as a whole. We have already made substantial progress toward meeting the need of economic security for the common man without sacrificing the basic provisions of individual liberty. A labor movement - growing not only in strength but also in social responsibility; financial controls and methods of taxation that serve to promote a more equitable distribution of income; the provisions of our social security program; public works that add immeasurably to the wealth of the entire nation - here is a developing pattern for a better future for the American people.

The opportunity - as well as the obligation - to aid in post-war world reconstruction, and the need to satisfy the pent-up demand of our own people for all those products which we must now go without should be an insurance against economic collapse at the close of the war. Economists are agreed that there need be no depression - if the American people by their very fears do not help create one. Rather than depression, in fact, the post-war demand for goods should tax our economic resources to the limit. How can we doubt that science and technology, newly inspired, will fail to point the way to further progress? And such progress - because of our new realization that democracy must be based upon economic security as well as upon political liberty - will be built upon a firmer foundation than at any time in the past. There is going to be less wealth for a privileged minority in the future America, but more real wealth for the people as a whole.

When our industrial machine is made over for peace, it will be more efficient than ever before. The war will have compelled us to scrap both machines and methods that are inefficient and wasteful. In the building of new homes, in equipping them with new conveniences and labor saving devices, in the production of the automobile of the future, in the development of peacetime air transportation, in the provision of new forms of popular entertainment - the persistent improvements of past years are bound to continue. The promise of the future is greater opportunity and a higher standard of living - again for the people as a whole.

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It is infinitely tragic that we have to go through such a devastating war before we can remake our world. But it has not marked the breakdown of civilization. It has energized the great potential strength of democracy. Nevertheless let us continue to be realistic about it. Victory in war will not save democracy. Rather it will give democracy another opportunity to save itself. And if it is to do so there is one quality of mind that I think is more important than any blueprints for the future - a quality of mind for which the world must especially rely upon youth - upon such young men and women as you who are today graduating.

This is open-mindedness, elasticity of thought. In this dynamic, constantly changing world, new ideas and new processes are essential to meet new problems. The history of our country has been one of alternative periods of advance and consolidation. We need both the conservative and the liberal. Each has an important function in maintaining society upon a steady keel. But youth's role should be to press continually forward along the road to social democracy,

willing to experiment, willing to try new methods - its goal constant but the means adaptable.

The underlying problem of the world today is the deep and tragic conflict between the ideal and the real. We believe in peace, and we are at war; we believe in individual freedom ; and we suppress the rights of minorities; we believe in social justice, and here in our own country there are still those who live in want and poverty. The challenge of our times is to give a new validity to the hopes and aspirations which are the basis of democracy as a way of life. This challenge can be met. But it can only be met through a reawakening of that faith which throughout our national history as animated all the great leaders of democracy - faith in the American people, faith in our ideals, faith in our ability to realize them.